

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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INSIGHT INTO BIBLE TRUTH

#249

"NOR IN JERUSALEM"

--by David Vaughn Elliott

"Nor in Jerusalem" jumped off the page during my morning devotions the other day. Not that I wasn't well acquainted with the verse already.

But it struck me anew: prophetic, poignant, and personal. An unnamed woman had a concern we all should have; correct worship. Jesus told her, "An hour is coming when neither in this mountain *nor in Jerusalem* will you worship the Father... God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (**John 4:21-24**).

Jerusalem is arguably the most revered, as well as the most contested, city in the world. There will be no peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians without an agreement on Jerusalem. Jews, Muslims, and various branches of Christianity maintain holy sites within Jerusalem's walls.

Jesus said, "Nor in Jerusalem."

The Jerusalem that Jesus referred to is not the huge spread of modern Jerusalem. Rather, it is a tiny area within modern Jerusalem that is surrounded by walls and called "The Old City."

That's the Jerusalem of which Jesus visited and spoke.
That's the contested Jerusalem with various holy sites.
That's the Jerusalem of this Insight.

Covering only 220 acres, the Old City is smaller than the National Mall in Washington, DC. The Old City is about one-fourth the size of Central Park in New York City. So tiny, yet so important.

Jerusalem Before Jesus

To appreciate the astounding nature of Jesus' remark, we must go back 1,500 years before Jesus...to Moses.

Jesus told the unnamed Samaritan woman, "We [Jews] worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews". (**John 4:22**)

From the time of Moses, the Jews had been taught the correct way to worship God. The first four of the Ten Commandments directly relate to worship of God. So also does the tabernacle, for which God gave Moses detailed instructions.

Many lessons are wrapped up in the tabernacle, but we are only concerned here with its location. Obviously, being a tent-like structure, it was made to be set up and dismantled over and over again as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

But there would be a day when that temporary system would cease. God told Moses, "You shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices." (**Deuteronomy 12:5-6**)

Ten times in Deuteronomy, emphasis is placed on worship in the Promised Land at the place God would choose.

Fast forward 500 years to King Solomon.

Solomon built a magnificent permanent temple in Jerusalem. At the great dedication ceremony when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.

The priests could not enter into the House of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house...

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice". (**2 Chron. 7:1-2, 12**)

Jerusalem thus became sacred to the Jews. No city could be compared to it. It was there they sacrificed. It was there they met God.

Years later, when Jerusalem was devastated by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews in captivity were devastated emotionally.

"By the Rivers of Babylon," a pop song in the 1970's and 1980's, was taken from a portion of **Psalms 137**: "By the

rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion [Jerusalem]... there our captors demanded of us songs... saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy." With such a background, Jesus dared to say, "Nor in Jerusalem."

Jesus' View of Jerusalem

It is God who, with fire, glory, and spoken word, clearly showed the Jews that the temple in Jerusalem was the place He had chosen for His worship. That's why Jesus could tell the Samaritan woman that the Samaritans were wrong and the Jews were right about the worship of God, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews". (**John 4:22**)

But just before that, Jesus said what would be astounding to any Jew, "An hour is coming when neither in this mountain *nor in Jerusalem* will you worship the Father". (**vs. 21**)

The exact place God himself had chosen would no longer be the place to worship Him. Jesus was challenging 1,000 years of Jewishness. One thousand years of what almighty God himself had ordained.

Jesus loved Jerusalem; Jesus wept over Jerusalem. During the Triumphal Entry when He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation". (**Luke 19:41-44**)

Jesus thus predicted Jerusalem's total destruction, which would become world history just forty years later. And there is a great difference between the former destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians and the coming destruction by the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70.

In the former case, there was a promise of rebuilding after 70 years. In the latter case, there is no such promise or prediction.

Jerusalem After Jesus

It was God who chose the temple in Jerusalem. It was God who revoked that choice when His Son died on Calvary. The moment Jesus died "behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split" (**Matthew 27:51**).

The veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. With Jesus' death and shed blood for our sins, the

whole old system was done away. "We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh." (**Hebrews 10:19-20**) Jesus replaced the old way. That is why He could declare, "Nor in Jerusalem."

In Solomon's time, God had sent fire from heaven to authenticate the worship at the temple in Jerusalem. However, forty years after tearing the veil in two, God sent the Romans to physically wipe the temple from off the face of the earth. It has never been rebuilt, even though attempts have been made.

In A.D. 132, Bar-Cochba led a Jewish uprising, reconquering Jerusalem, intending to rebuild the temple. However, Emperor Hadrian's top commander crushed the revolt. Bar-Cochba was slain, and it was all over. A new idolatrous city, Aelia Capitolina, was built on Jerusalem's ruins. Jews were forbidden to enter Jerusalem upon pain of death. They could only look from afar on each anniversary of Bar-Cochba's defeat.

In A.D. 361, Rome acquired a new emperor, Julian, called "the Apostate". As an avowed enemy of Christianity, he had allies in the Jews. "Rebuild the temple," ordered the emperor. Jews flocked to Jerusalem, opened their purses, and rolled up their sleeves. Julian provided great sums of money and assigned one of his ministers to take charge.

Their first job was to clear the debris. The Jews were enthralled. But what's that? Fire! They fled. Horrible balls of fire broke out near the foundations. The fire died down. Back to work. Fire again, and again, and again. They could not continue. The work was abandoned.

Shortly after, Julian was slain in battle just 18 months after taking office. It was all over. The fire? Some say it was a miracle; some say it was natural. In any case, it is a fact of history attested to by both Christian and pagan contemporary sources. (See Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chap. 23, Part 3).

Neither the rebel Bar-Cochba, nor the Emperor Julian, could frustrate Jesus' solemn prediction: "Nor in Jerusalem."

Jerusalem Today

Since the Six-Day War in 1967, the Jews have been back in Jerusalem. And the temple? For over thirteen centuries, the Muslim Dome of the Rock has been on the former temple site.

Jews believe that if the temple is to be rebuilt, it can only be built on the exact spot where it stood before. If you know anything about Middle East politics, you know that Israel does not dare touch the Dome of the Rock.

Thus, Jews continue to this day without the place of worship that God had chosen.

All that Jews have today is a portion of the Western Wall often called "the Wailing Wall". Some mistakenly think this is a surviving wall of the temple. Rather, it is a portion of the retaining wall that held up a level area upon which the temple was built.

The Wailing Wall is today the most holy place for the Jews. Filled with lament. Filled with hopes. And filled with paper prayers.

Not only Jews, but people of many religions write prayers and place them in the cracks of the wall. The concept is that the wall is the closest that people can get to God. More than a million prayers are placed in the wall every year. Twice a year they are cleaned out, bagged, and buried. What a vain and superstitious attempt to reach God!

On the temple mount, the Dome of the Rock not only stands in the way of Jewish aspirations for rebuilding their temple, it is an open attack upon Jesus Christ. Arabic inscriptions on the walls repeatedly attack Jesus. Here is a direct quote from an Islamic web site which reproduces the inscriptions in Arabic and provides the English translation: *"There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate... O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not 'Three' - Cease! (it is) better for you! - God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son."* A frontal attack on Jesus in the same city that cried, "Crucify him!"

Then there are the "Christian" holy places in Jerusalem today. The main attraction is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The main owners/custodians of the complex are the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox, and the Roman Catholic churches.

On display is the stone of anointing, a limestone slab commemorative of the supposed slab upon which Jesus' dead body was prepared for burial. Pilgrims kneel around it to pray, rub their hands on it, and kiss it.

There is the purported rock of Golgotha, which can be seen through glass. At the top of it under an altar, there is a silver plate with a hole through which you can extend your hand to touch the rock.

There is the purported tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, the prison where Jesus was held, a piece of the stone rolled away by the angels, Jesus' tomb itself, and much more. It is full of images, burning candles, and altars with masses celebrated daily.

Should I mention that under the place of crucifixion is Adam's burial place and that Jesus' blood ran down into

the ground and into Adam's skull? House of superstition, myth, and idolatry!

"Nor in Jerusalem," said Jesus. "Worship in spirit and truth," said Jesus. Before Jesus, Jerusalem was God's dwelling place on earth. Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and resurrection took place in and just outside Jerusalem.

The true Gospel began in Jerusalem less than two months later. Jerusalem was the center of the Gospel for many years. In A.D. 70, all that was terminated dramatically. Jerusalem is no longer "the Holy City". It is no longer God's dwelling place on earth. There may be some "worship in spirit and truth" somewhere within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem today, but it would be hard to find. In its place is superstition, myth, idolatry, unbelief, and outright denial of Jesus being the Son of God.

Jerusalem is no longer the place to worship God. We must seek Him in spirit and truth through Jesus Christ who is the Truth, no matter where we dwell on this planet.

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